

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA
FORT WAYNE DIVISION**

MELANIE ANN RAEB,

Plaintiff,

v.

STELLAR RECOVERY, INC.,

Defendant.

CIVIL COMPLAINT

CASE NO. 1:17-cv-00169

DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

COMPLAINT

NOW comes MELANIE ANN RAEB (“Plaintiff”), by and through her attorneys, Sulaiman Law Group, Ltd. (“Sulaiman”), complaining as to the conduct of STELLAR RECOVERY, INC. (“Defendant”), as follows:

NATURE OF THE ACTION

1. Plaintiff brings this action for damages pursuant to the Telephone Consumer Protection Act (“TCPA”) under 47 U.S.C. §227 *et seq.*, and the Indiana Deceptive Consumer Sales Act (“IDCSA”) under I.C. 24-5-0.5 for Defendant's unlawful practices.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE

2. This action arises under and is brought pursuant to the TCPA. Subject matter jurisdiction is conferred upon this Court by 47 U.S.C §227, 28 U.S.C. §§1331 and 1337, as the action arises under the laws of the United States. Supplemental jurisdiction exists for the state law claim pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1367.

3. Venue is proper in this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1391 as Defendant conducts business in the Northern District of Indiana and a substantial portion of the events or omissions giving rise to the claims occurred within the Northern District of Indiana.

PARTIES

4. Plaintiff is a 41 year-old natural “person” as defined by 47 U.S.C. §153(39).

5. Defendant is a collection agency with its principal place of business located at 4500 Salisbury Road, Suite 105, Jacksonville, Florida 32216. On its website, Defendant states that its “strong commitment to compliance produces a high degree of accountability at all levels of the company which gives [its] employees the incentive to generate results month after month. Simply put, Stellar is focused on being the most compliant, professional, and competitive collection agency in the industry—nothing less will do.”¹ Defendant regularly collects upon consumers in the State of Indiana.

6. Defendant is a “person” as defined by 47 U.S.C. §153(39).

7. Defendant acted through its agents, employees, officers, members, directors, heirs, successors, assigns, principals, trustees, sureties, subrogees, representatives and insurers at all times relevant to the instant action.

FACTS SUPPORTING CAUSES OF ACTION

8. In approximately November 2015, Plaintiff began receiving calls to her cellular phone, (517) XXX-3177 from Defendant. *See* attached Exhibit A for a true and correct copy of an affidavit signed by Plaintiff.

¹ <http://stellarrecoveryinc.com/about-us/>

9. At all times relevant to the instant action, Plaintiff was the sole subscriber, owner, and operator of the cellular phone ending in 3177. Plaintiff is and always has been financially responsible for the cellular phone and its services.

10. Upon speaking with Defendant, Plaintiff was informed that it was attempting to collect upon an outstanding debt. *See* Exhibit A.

11. Plaintiff notified Defendant that the debt was inaccurate, and upon its refusal to work out a solution with her, Plaintiff demanded that it stop calling her. *Id.*

12. Despite Plaintiff's demands, Defendant continued to relentlessly call her cellular phone up until the summer of 2016. *Id.*

13. The phone number that Defendant most often uses to contact Plaintiff's cellular phone is (419) 386-0527. *Id.*

14. Upon information and belief, the above phone number ending in 0527 is a number utilized by Defendant during its debt collection activity.

15. When Plaintiff answers calls from Defendant, she experiences a recorded message or brief pause, lasting approximately three to five seconds in length, before a live representative begins to speak. *Id.*

16. Plaintiff has received not less than 76 phone calls from Defendant since asking it to stop. *Id.*

17. Defendant has also called Plaintiff's husband in an attempt to locate her and collect upon the alleged debt. *Id.*

18. Frustrated over Defendant's conduct, Plaintiff spoke with Sulaiman regarding her rights, resulting in expenses.

19. Plaintiff takes medication to treat her anxiety, and Defendant's phone calls have caused her a great deal of stress and have worsened her overall physical condition. *Id.*

20. With the goal of specifically addressing Defendant's conduct, Plaintiff has expended approximately \$62.00 to purchase and maintain an application subscription on her cellular phone to block the calls, resulting in pecuniary loss. *Id.*

21. Plaintiff has been unfairly and unnecessarily harassed by Defendant's actions.

22. Plaintiff has suffered concrete harm as a result of Defendant's actions, including but not limited to, invasion of privacy, aggravation that accompanies collection telephone calls, emotional distress, increased risk of personal injury resulting from the distraction caused by the never-ending calls, increased usage of her telephone services, loss of cellular phone capacity, diminished cellular phone functionality, decreased battery life on her cellular phone, and diminished space for data storage on her cellular phone.

COUNT I – VIOLATIONS OF THE TELEPHONE CONSUMER PROTECTION ACT

23. Plaintiff repeats and realleges paragraphs 1 through 22 as though fully set forth herein.

24. The TCPA, pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(1)(iii), prohibits calling persons on their cellular phone using an automatic telephone dialing system ("ATDS") without their consent. The TCPA, under 47 U.S.C. § 227(a)(1), defines an ATDS as "equipment which has the capacity...to store or produce telephone numbers to be called, using a random or sequential number generator; and to dial such numbers."

25. Defendant used an ATDS in connection with its communications directed towards Plaintiff's cellular phone. The recorded message or brief pause, lasting approximately three to five seconds in length, that Plaintiff experienced prior to being connected with a live representative

is instructive that an ATDS was being utilized to generate the phone calls. In addition, the nature and frequency of Defendant's contacts points to the involvement of an ATDS.

26. Defendant violated the TCPA by placing at least 76 phone calls to Plaintiff's cellular phone using an ATDS without her consent. Any consent Plaintiff may have given to be contacted by Defendant using an ATDS was explicitly revoked upon her demands to cease contact.

27. The calls placed by Defendant to Plaintiff were regarding business transactions and not for emergency purposes as defined by the TCPA under 47 U.S.C. §227(b)(1)(A)(i).

28. Under the TCPA, pursuant to 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(3)(B), Defendant is liable to Plaintiff for at least \$500.00 per call. Moreover, Defendant's willful and knowing violations of the TCPA should trigger this Honorable Court's ability to triple the damages to which Plaintiff is otherwise entitled to under 47 U.S.C. § 227(b)(3)(C).

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, MELANIE ANN RAEB, respectfully requests that this Honorable Court enter judgment in her favor as follows:

- a. Declaring that the practices complained of herein are unlawful and violate the aforementioned statutes and regulations;
- b. Awarding Plaintiff damages of at least \$500.00 per phone call and treble damages pursuant to 47 U.S.C. §§ 227(b)(3)(B)&(C);
- c. Awarding Plaintiff costs and reasonable attorney fees;
- d. Enjoining Defendant from further contacting Plaintiff; and
- e. Awarding any other relief as this Honorable Court deems just and appropriate.

COUNT II – VIOLATIONS OF THE INDIANA DECEPTIVE CONSUMER SALES ACT

29. Plaintiff repeats and realleges paragraphs 1 through 28 as though fully set forth herein.

30. Defendant violated I.C. 24-5-0.5-3(a) and (b)(19) by engaging in an unfair, abusive and deceptive practice through its systematic collection efforts towards Plaintiff.

31. The IDCSA states:

“A supplier may not commit an unfair, abusive, or deceptive act, omission, or practice in connection with a consumer transaction. Such an act, omission, or practice by a supplier is a violation of this chapter whether it occurs before, during, or after the transaction. An act, omission, or practice prohibited by this section includes both implicit and explicit misrepresentations.” I.C. 24-5-0.5-3(a).

“Without limiting the scope of subsection (a), the following acts, and the following representations as to the subject matter of a consumer transaction, made orally, in writing, or by electronic communication, by a supplier are deceptive acts: The violation by a supplier of 47 U.S.C. 227, including any rules or regulations issued under 47 U.S.C. 227.” I.C. 24-5-0.5-3(b)(19).

32. Plaintiff is a “person” as defined by the IDCSA, I.C. 24-5-0.5-2(a)(2).

33. Defendant is a “supplier” as defined by the IDCSA, I.C. 24-5-0.5-2(a)(3).

34. Defendant’s collection calls to Plaintiff were “consumer transactions” as defined by the IDCSA, I.C. 24-5-0.5-2(a)(1)(C).

35. Defendant engaged in unfair, abusive, and deceptive behavior in its transactions with Plaintiff. Through systematic and frequent collection attempts, Defendant has used an ATDS to relentlessly contact Plaintiff. After it was unwilling to work with her to resolve the disputed debt, Defendant was specifically notified by Plaintiff to stop contacting her. Any consent Plaintiff may have given was explicitly revoked by her demands to cease contacting her. However, Defendant purposefully ignored Plaintiff’s prompts in an abusive attempt to collect payment from her.

36. Through its conduct, Defendant falsely represented that it had the lawful ability to contact Plaintiff through means of an ATDS. Once Plaintiff demanded that it stop calling her, Defendant was obligated under the TCPA to cease its contacts. In defiance of the law, however, Defendant continued its deceptive conduct. Upon information and belief, Defendant engages in this conduct

on a systematic and frequent basis, knowing that consumers are unlikely to be aware of their rights and susceptible to sustained pressure.

37. In violating the TCPA, Defendant also violated one of the specifically enumerated prongs of the IDCSA, I.C. 24-5-0.5-3(b)(19). “In other words, an IDCSA claim may be based on one or more of the acts *or* representations on the list. A claim may be based only on an enumerated act, and not a representations at all.” *Anderson v. O’Leary Paint Co.*, 2011 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 110837 at 17.

38. In violating the TCPA, Defendant engaged in illegal behavior during its collection efforts towards Plaintiff. Defendant intended that Plaintiff rely on its illegal behavior. The IDCSA was designed to protect consumers, such as Plaintiff, from the exact behavior committed by Defendant.

39. The IDCSA further states:

“A person relying upon an uncured or incurable deceptive act may bring an action for the damages actually suffered as a consumer as a result of the deceptive act or five hundred dollars (\$500), whichever is greater. The court may increase damages for a willful deceptive act in an amount that does not exceed the greater of: (1) three (3) times the actual damages of the consumer suffering the loss; or (2) one thousand dollars (\$1,000).” I.C. 24-5-0.5-4(a)(1)(2).

40. Although unsuccessful, Plaintiff made attempts to correct Defendant’s incurable deceptive acts by demanding that it cease contacting her. However, Defendant’s conduct is an incurable deceptive act of which notice would not remedy. The fact that Defendant was provided with notices to stop calling and refused to abide by said notices, evidenced by calling Plaintiff at least 76 times after she told it to stop, shows that its behavior is incurable and that it has no intention of curbing its behavior.

41. Defendant conducts the above described behavior on a wide and frequent basis. This goes against the state's goal of preventing the phone from frequently ringing with unwanted calls. Every call uses some of the phone owner's time and mental energy, both of which are precious.

42. In addition to inhibiting Plaintiff's time and energy, as pled in paragraphs 16 through 22, Plaintiff has suffered damages as a result of Defendant's unlawful collection practices, including spending money on the purchase of a blocking application. Plaintiff is entitled to relief pursuant to I.C. 24-5-0.5-4(a)(1)(2). Plaintiff is entitled to relief pursuant to I.C. 24-5-0.5-4(a)(1)(2).

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff, MELANIE ANN RAEB, respectfully requests that this Honorable Court enter judgment in her favor as follows:

- a. Declaring that the practices complained of herein are unlawful and violate the aforementioned statutes and regulations;
- b. Awarding Plaintiff damages, in an amount to be determined at trial, as provided under I.C. 24-5-0.5-4(a)(1)(2);
- c. Awarding Plaintiff costs and reasonable attorney fees as provided under I.C. 24-5-0.5-4(a);
- d. Enjoining Defendant to cease contacting Plaintiff; and
- d. Awarding any other relief as this Honorable Court deems just and appropriate.

Dated: April 19, 2017

s/ Nathan C. Volheim
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Respectfully submitted,

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